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Another fictional 'Iranian plot' in London?

Claims of an Iranian plot to attack Tel Aviv's embassy in London have emerged at an all-too-convenient moment for the pro-Israel lobby's push to proscribe Iran's IRGC as a terrorist entity in Britain.

The arrest of a group reportedly consisting of Iranian nationals, accused of planning an attack on the Israeli embassy in London, has coincided with an aggressive lobbying campaign to classify Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization in the UK. While details of the case remain sparse, previous such allegations suggest that linking this plot to Tehran without substantiated evidence is politically motivated.

On 7 May, [The Telegraph](#) claimed that five individuals were detained in what the UK Home Secretary described as one of the "biggest counter-terrorism operations in recent years." According to the report, four of those arrested were Iranian nationals, apprehended under Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006, allegedly for plotting an assault on the Israeli embassy in London.

A confused arrest, a convenient campaign

Yet, contradictions in the report raised significant public skepticism. While *The Telegraph* asserted that "the suspected terror cell was hours from unleashing the attack when the men were arrested," it also noted that the suspects were detained in cities across England – three of them located around a four-hour drive from London, and another an hour away. The disparity sparked a wave of theories and doubts among the British public.

As these logistical inconsistencies drew scrutiny, right-wing media outlets in Britain seized the moment to stir anti-immigrant sentiments. On Talk TV, Kevin O'Sullivan descended into hysteria, [warning](#), "We are going to have a Southport 2 unless we are careful," invoking a

racially charged incident that had ignited riots. The immigration status of the suspects became the focal point for many conservative commentators.

Simultaneously, the pro-Israel lobby began exploiting the incident to reinvigorate its campaign for the IRGC's designation as a terrorist organization. On 28 April, Progressive Britain—a group aligned with the Blairite wing of the Labour Party – published an article titled "[Why the UK Should Proscribe the IRGC](#)." Its author, Jemima Shelley, is not only a non-resident fellow at Labour Friends of Israel (LFI) but also a senior analyst at United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI).

UANI has played a [recurring role](#) in previous efforts to influence British policy against the Islamic Republic. Masquerading as a neutral non-profit, the group is chaired by Jeb Bush and features an advisory board packed with pro-Israel operatives.

Former Mossad Director Meir Dagan was a member until his death, and the US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth currently sits on its Veterans Advisory Council.

Nigel Farage, leader of the far-right Reform UK Party, opportunistically called on the Labour government to proscribe the IRGC, bizarrely claiming that “friends of mine who live in the Middle East are astonished we haven’t done it.”

Terror claims as political leverage

On 8 October 2024, MI5 Director General Ken McCallum delivered a speech at London’s Counter Terrorism Operations Centre, [stating](#):

“Since the [killing of Mahsa Amini](#) in 2022 we’ve seen plot after plot here in the UK, at an unprecedented pace and scale. Since January 2022, with police partners, we have responded to twenty Iran-backed plots presenting potentially lethal threats to British citizens and UK residents.”

Although McCallum insisted that the intelligence agency does not politicize terrorism cases, his speech disproportionately emphasized threats from Russia, China, and Iran – the UK’s designated strategic adversaries. Commentators quickly seized on his remarks to bolster narratives of Iranian culpability.

Despite referencing 20 "Iran-backed" plots, British authorities have failed to provide concrete evidence linking Tehran to any of them. Officials argue that such ambiguity is strategic, offering "plausible deniability." But in most cases, their accusations rest on tenuous associations, such as Tehran's political animosity toward the individuals in question.

Consider the highly publicized case of Austrian national Magomed Husejn Dovtaev, who was convicted in February 2023 after recording video footage of the offices of [Iran International](#), a Saudi-funded Persian-language news outlet based in London.

Dovtaev [claimed](#) he had been defrauded of €20,000 and was seeking those responsible at the location. Despite denying any connection to Iran, he was convicted of collecting information likely to be useful for terrorism.

On 4 March, Britain's Security Minister Dan Jarvis repeated the claim of 20 terror plots and that "[the Iranian regime is targeting dissidents](#)." He also told parliament that "The Iranian Intelligence Services, which include the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the IRGC, and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, or MOIS, direct this damaging activity."

However, Jarvis clarifies that "rather than working directly on UK shores, they use criminal proxies to do their bidding. This helps to obfuscate their involvement, while they sit safely ensconced in Tehran."

While the existence of Iranian intelligence operations abroad cannot be ruled out, the recurring claims tying Tehran to every suspicious activity lack transparency and verification.

A precedent of manipulation

The current frenzy echoes the Israeli embassy bombing in London in 1994. Initially [blamed](#) on "pro-Iranian extremists" allegedly tied to Lebanon's Hezbollah, the attack resulted in the arrest of five Palestinians. Two of them, Jawad Botmeh and Samar Alami, were convicted of conspiracy despite no direct evidence or allegation that they planted the bomb.

At the time, human rights group [Amnesty International](#) issued a statement raising concerns that neither Botmeh nor Alami had been granted "their right to a fair trial because they have been denied full disclosure - both during and after the trial - of all information."

"There was no direct evidence connecting either of them to the attacks and both had alibis. The appeal was based on the grounds that the convictions were unsafe, including due to the failure of the prosecution to disclose evidence to the defence, and on the length of the sentences."

When the late veteran journalist and long-time West Asia correspondent Robert Fisk wrote on the case for the *Independent* in 1998, he [described](#) it as follows:

"The trial was, to put it mildly, a very puzzling affair. Even before it began, the case developed unusually. First of all, the police charged Nadia Zekra, a very middle-class Palestinian lady, with planting the bomb outside the embassy. Explosive traces had supposedly been found on a table in her home. Then, once the trial began, all charges against Zekra were dropped. Another Palestinian, Mahmoud Abu-Wardeh, was charged, but the jury acquitted him on all charges. And in the pre-trial period, the judge allowed both Alami and Botmeh to go free on bail."

Fisk noted that Alami and Botmeh had expressed their belief that a shady figure known as Reda Moghrabi was an Israeli agent and had set them up. Yet, following the bombing, Moghrabi disappeared. The claim of responsibility for the attack was also strange, anonymously submitted by the “Jaffa Team” of the “Palestinian resistance,” a group that never existed prior to, nor since, the attack.

On top of this, the pair were released early. Botmeh was set free in August of [2008](#), and Alami was released in April [2009](#) and deported to Lebanon. Their early release, combined with the fact that the two were allowed to walk the streets of London on bail until their conviction, raised even more questions about the nature of the bombing incident.

Even more damning were later revelations by former MI5 agents. David Shayler disclosed that British intelligence “[hid](#)” documents related to the bombing. Annie Machon, another ex-MI5 officer, [revealed](#) that an internal assessment concluded that Mossad itself had staged the explosion to justify demands for increased security at its embassy. The sophisticated device caused no fatalities, and the real perpetrators were never apprehended.

Keeping all of this information in mind, there is currently not enough evidence to draw any conclusions regarding the arrests of Iranian nationals and the alleged plot to attack the Israeli embassy. However, British media outlets and several members of parliament were quick to seize on the incident, using it to push the agenda of designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

Politics trumps evidence

With all this context in mind, the latest arrests of Iranian nationals – and the unsubstantiated claim of a planned embassy attack – must be scrutinized. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has categorically [denied involvement](#), asserting that “Iran stands ready to engage to shed light on what has truly transpired, and we reiterate that UK authorities should afford our citizens due process.”

Meanwhile, [The Guardian](#) has spun the case to highlight fears among Iranian dissidents in the UK, presenting the arrests as validation of threats from Tehran.

By rushing to implicate the IRGC, British media and officials are once again politicizing an unverified security incident. This tactic mirrors accusations they often level at Iran: weaponizing arrests for political ends. Regardless of who was truly behind the supposed plot, its timing conveniently serves those advocating for the IRGC's proscription.

What is clear is that claims of Iranian-linked terrorism continue to surface whenever Tel Aviv or its allies seek to ramp up pressure on the Islamic Republic.

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